

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

LISTING OF CLAIMS

1-5. (Cancelled)

6. (Original) A method of reducing the alcohol content of an alcohol containing beverage including the steps of

(i) processing the beverage by reverse osmosis or nanofiltration for producing a retentate and a raw permeate which includes alcohol;

(ii) contacting a first side of an hydrophobic microporous membrane with said raw permeate;

(iii) contacting a second side of the membrane with a strip solution to extract alcohol therefrom to form a dealcoholised permeate; and

(iv) combining the retentate with the dealcoholised permeate to form a dealcoholised beverage which has an alcohol content lower than that of the beverage.

7. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 6 wherein the strip solution and/or the raw permeate is or are heated to a temperature which is higher than that of the beverage prior to contacting the strip solution with the membrane.

8. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 7 wherein the temperature of the strip solution and/or the raw permeate is or are in the range 45° to 55°C prior to contacting the membrane.

9. (Cancelled)

10. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 6 wherein the beverage includes volatile components and wherein ~~the~~ a reverse osmosis or nanofiltration membrane is selected so that substantially all the volatile components remain in said retentate.

11. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 6 wherein the beverage is wine.

12. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 6 wherein the strip solution is water.

13. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 12 wherein carbon dioxide and/or oxygen is removed from the water prior to contacting the membrane.

14. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 12 wherein carbon dioxide and/or oxygen is removed from the raw permeate prior to contacting the membrane.

15. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 6 wherein the raw permeate has an alcohol content in a predetermined percentage range and after contacting the membrane the dealcoholised permeate has an alcohol content in a range which is substantially lower than that of the raw permeate.

16. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 15 wherein the alcohol content of the dealcoholised permeate is in the range 3% to 6% of volume.

17. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 15 wherein the alcohol content of the dealcoholised beverage is 0.5% to 1.5% lower than that of the beverage.

18. (Cancelled)

19. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim ~~[[18]]~~ 17 wherein the method includes the steps of determining if the alcohol content of the dealcoholised beverage is at or below a predetermined level and continuing to perform steps (i) to (iv) while the alcohol content of the dealcoholised beverage is above said predetermined level.

20.-29 (Cancelled)

30. (Previously Presented) A dealcoholised beverage made by the method claimed in claim 6.

31.-32. (Cancelled)

33. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 6 including the steps of storing the beverage in a container and wherein the step of combining the retentate with the dealcoholised permeate is effected by returning the retentate and dealcoholised permeate to the container.

34. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 33 wherein the retentate and dealcoholised permeate are mixed together prior to being returned to the container.

35. (Previously Presented) A method of reducing the alcohol content of wine including the steps of:

(i) pumping the wine from a tank to a reverse osmosis or nanofiltration unit, which separates the wine into a retentate and a raw permeate which includes alcohol;

(ii) returning the retentate to the tank;

(iii) passing the raw permeate to at least one contactor which includes an hydrophobic microporous membrane and wherein the raw permeate contacts one side of the membrane;

(iv) passing a strip solution to said at least one contactor whereby the strip solution contacts the other side of the membrane and alcohol passes from said one side to the other of said membrane into the strip solution;

(v) returning the dealcoholised permeate from said at least one contactor to the tank; and

(vi) continuing to perform steps (i) to (iv) until the alcohol content of the wine in the tank is at or below a predetermined level.

36. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 35 wherein:

the temperature of retentate in the reverse osmosis or nanofiltration unit is in the range 13°C to 25°C; and

the temperature of the strip solution in said at least one contactor is in the range 40°C to 70°C.

37. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 36 including the step of cooling the dealcoholised permeate before step (v) is performed.

38. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 37 wherein:

the raw permeate is degassed prior to step (iii); and the strip solution is water and the water is degassed prior to step (iv).

39. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 35 wherein the strip solution is water which is passed to a waste line after passing through said at least one contactor.